

Date: April 19, 2020

Message: “God’s Grace in the Thorns”

Text: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

I. Paul’s Thorn (v.7)

“*thorn in the flesh* is an idiom meaning *something which causes serious trouble and difficulty—trouble, woe, suffering, serious inconvenience*” (Louw-Nida)

Paul’s “*thorn*” made him feel very “*weak*” (v.9) lit. “*without strength, infirmity, incapacity, limitation.*”

“*torment*” – lit. “*beat with fists*”

The words “*insults, distresses, persecutions, difficulties*” (v.10) also give us a window into the nature of Paul’s “*thorn*” (v.7).

II. Paul’s Prayer and God’s Response (v.8-9a)

Praying to God about his thorn was a reasonable and righteous thing for Paul to do (Phil. 4:6).

Instead of removing Paul’s thorn, God promised him His sufficient grace and power to sustain Paul in the midst of his overwhelming trial.

“Power is continually increased as the weakness grows. The human weakness opens the way for more of Christ’s power and grace.” (A.T. Robertson)

God doesn’t always answer our prayers in the way we want, and He doesn’t do so not because He hates us, but because He loves us far more than we can imagine. And because God loves us, He gives us what we *need* most, not necessarily what we *want* most.

III. God’s Purposes for Thorns (v.7,9)

Thorns are not accidental or coincidental, they do not come to us by random chance or bad luck. God is sovereign over every detail of our lives including the arrival and departure of our thorns. Satan was involved in whatever the thorn was in Paul’s life, but God was in ultimate control over it. The devil is God’s devil. Satan can never do anything in a believer’s life without God’s permission.

A. To keep Paul humble

“*to keep me from exalting myself*” (2X, v.7)

Paul was in danger of pride and self-exaltation and God took steps to keep him humble. God thinks humility is more important than comfort. Humility is more important than freedom from pain.

Pride is our greatest enemy and humility is our greatest ally in life (Jms. 4:6)

B. To keep Paul dependent on God's all-sufficient, empowering grace

“Weakness simply demonstrates what has been true all along: we are completely dependent upon God for life and breath and everything else...weakness provides the context in which true strength is found. Weakness is not what you and I should be afraid of. We should fear our delusion of strength. Strong people tend not to reach out for help, because they don't think they need it. When you have been proven weak, you tap into the endless resources of divine power that are yours in Christ.” (Paul Tripp)

“If none of God's saints were poor and tested we should not know half so well the consolations of divine grace.” (C.H. Spurgeon)

C. To bless Paul and glorify God

“The deepest need that you and I have in weakness and adversity is not quick relief, but the well-grounded confidence that what is happening to us is part of the greatest purpose of God in the universe — the glorification of the grace and power of his Son — the grace and power that bore him to the cross and kept him there until the work of love was done.” (John Piper)

“Those who would expect to glorify their God must expect to encounter many trials. No one can be esteemed before the Lord without many conflicts. If, then, your path is marked with many trials, rejoice in it because your life will provide greater evidence of the all-sufficient grace of God. As for His failing you, don't dream of it—hate every thought of it. The God who has been sufficient until now, should be trusted to the end.” (C.H. Spurgeon)

IV. Paul's Profound Response (v.9b-10)

- It took only one sentence from God to radically change Paul's mindset toward his thorn
- Paul's circumstances did not change one iota, the thorn was as thorny as ever, but he went from begging to have it taken to boasting that it remained
- His response was centered on magnifying God's power and grace in the midst of extremely difficult circumstances that weakened him to the core

“Complaints and continued pleas are a common reaction to a negative answer, but Paul does not express them. Instead Paul demonstrates gladness, because he is fully aware that divine grace will be more than sufficient for him to cope with his malady. He cheerfully endures his human frailty knowing that Christ functions within him.” (William Hendriksen)

Questions to Ponder:

- What is your “thorn(s)” today?
- Do you believe that your loving Heavenly Father has ordained your “thorn” for good purposes in our life? What are some of those purposes?
- Are you praying about your “thorn”?
- As you pray, is your heart glad and content in the Lord however He chooses to answer?
- Is your “thorn” cultivating a deeper, authentic humility in your heart?
- Is your “thorn” drawing you nearer to the Lord in dependence upon Him?
- How have you experienced God’s powerful, all-sufficient grace in the midst of your weakness?
- What *means of grace* (e.g. the Word, prayer, fellowship, fasting, memorization, communion, etc.) have been especially sweet to you in the midst of your “thorns” and weakness?
- How has your “thorn” resulted in greater glory to the Lord in your life?